Mathematics Teachers' Attitude on Classroom Observation Practices and the Impact

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Abstract

Classroom Observation Practice (COP) is one of an effective tool for teacher professional development. Almost all education institutions are using this activity for staff evaluation, experiment of teaching new method, and doing action research or teaching improvement. For the purpose of better COP, this study focuses on attitude of mathematics teachers by investigating 18 observers. Results from investigation show that even if teachers have high working experience, but they still need more to see other teachers teaching technique. Although participants might gain new way of teaching and skills from colleagues as they mentioned; on the other hand, on practice side, there is no concrete evident showing that their teaching changed after having COP. Study suggested that inviting expertise from outside may interest teachers who like to see new way of teaching. Less COP but be creative and new may produce better results of COP.

Keywords: Classroom observation, Attitude, Teaching methodology, Impact

Introduction

Developing teachers' profession is regarded as important and a must activity for those teachers who are serving students in knowledge and skills. This kind of development activity is so-called in-service training program. Basically in-service training program is divided into two types, organizational partnership and small group (Reimers, 2003, pp. 69-70). This small type is including peer or group observation (classroom observation) (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 14), which is a formal or informal activity of teaching observation that conducted by fellow teachers, administrators, or instructional specialists. COP was usually taking place in a classroom or other environment and focusing on constructive critical feedback and instructional techniques rather than making monitoring, criticisms, or judgment to the colleagues' teaching skills (Great school Partnership, 2013). It is also an important tool to discover teaching practices of oneself or colleagues and to improve or change teaching method in a better way ("British council," n.d.). Further more, teachers participated the activity are expected to learn new way from each other, as the same time, it is a good chance to review teaching skills and discovering good practice and need (Race et al., 2009). COP has many different purposes; these three areas, however, have commonly used such as '' (1) description of instructional practices; (2) investigation of instructional inequities for different groups of students; and (3) improvement of teachers' classroom instruction based on feedback from individual classroom or school profiles''. Participants may use one of following lists such as, writing narrative, field notes, or checklists to record phenomenon that happening during observation (Waxman, n.d.).

Several studies on COP found that mathematics and science teachers had positive attitudes toward classroom visits with statistically significant level (0.05) (Kishek, 1997). Both teachers and students admitted having positive attitudes towards observation (Ilies, n.d.). Among them, they also have different point of views on such activity (Richards, 2006). Other than positive side, some studies also found negative effect that although classroom observation is perceived as indispensable component as mentioned, but it is not well received by teachers who had been observed in general (Akbari, Samar & Tajik, n.d). Those who had been observed were not be completely positive about their experiences, they gained little or nothing from it (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2011). This might be because of the nature of classroom observation that during the lesson many things might occur simultaneously. Personal feeling is a major influencing instructor that the observers is not only there to help for developing teaching skills, but also to evaluate how well instructor is doing (Richards, 2011).

COP in Teacher Training Colleges throughout the country has been continuously practicing for years, teachers and school administrators spent a lot of time on the said issue. Some teachers might even leave the class just for observing colleagues. So, they couldn't finish lessons in time and students did not learn full curriculum as a results. From 2009 to 2013, teachers in Khangkhay Teacher Training College have involved in COP more than 290 times; for instance, observation for feedback, observation for doing research, and new teachers observation (Academic Promotion Office, 2013). Considering its importance and attention of teachers for helping each other on improving teaching skills in this school; what teachers' behavior is actually changed after observation is not clear; what teachers did learn from the observation and how they utilize what they observed is not yet discovered; so, study on their attitude is needed. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore teachers' attitudes on COP; more specifically, to investigate the reason why teachers want to participate in COP, identify what teachers actually observed and learned from the observation, and to find out how they utilize what they gained from the observation and the impact of such activity.

Methodology

Data collection was conducted in Khangkhay Teacher Training College in November and December 2013. This school has the role for training new kindergarten, primary, and secondary teachers to the provinces in the northeast of the country. School has 158 staffs in total with 142 teachers, and 2,586 students in academic year 2013. According to informal investigation from some schools around, there is only this school that has high frequency of practice in classroom observation, which is regarded as a suitable place for collect data.

To elicit teachers' attitude on COP, the study used both quantitative and qualitative methods with different instruments that is questionnaire, participated observation, and interview. The questionnaire was adapted from (Hill, 2000). It includes 2 parts, personal information and their attitude on COP with 14 open questions. Information that respondents were asked is in an interval year 2012-13. The questionnaire has been distributed to 15 present mathematics teachers. There were, however, 11 respondents (68.75%) with missing 4 of them with the reason that not in the interval of requirement, some teachers have not been involved in the activity for years, and some has just been graduated from master course.

Participated observation has been implemented 3 weeks during October to November 2013. The study observed 8 mathematics teachers and 4 school administrators while they were observing the instruction of those teachers. During observation, researcher took some notes and photos about their behavior and their interaction with the class.

Other than mentioned above, researcher has also had follow up interview with 2 mathematics teachers and one school administrator who is responsible for teacher promotion. The interview was taken in suitable room in December 5 and 6, 2013 individually. Each interview lasted 30 minutes approximately with 18 questions.

Results

1. Profiles of respondents

Information from questionnaires, see table.1, show that participants respond this study mostly have high working experiences that is 8 teachers (53%) have working experience more than 10 years, while 7 teachers (47%) have working experience 10 years and less. Although the numbers of teachers' experience might cover high percentage; but their qualification especially in master degree is still low, only 3 of them (20%) are holding master degree; while 12 of them (80%) is still holding bachelor. This is because of the total number of master in the school has also less than 20 teachers (13 %). Looking at the participation in COP among 15 teachers since 2012; more than half of them, 10 teachers (67%), participated in COP more than 10 times; and 5 of them (33%) attended COP less than 10 times. Nonetheless, the attention in COP is still very frequent comparing to other schools.

Table 1: Profiles of respondents

Items	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Work experience		
10 years and less	7	47
More than 10 years	8	53
Total	***15***	***100***
Qualification		
Bachelor	12	80
Master	3	20
Total	***15***	***100***
Participated observation since 2012		
Less than 10 times	5	33
10 times and more	10	67
Total	***15***	***100***

2. Objectives and reasons on COP

By responding to the plan of teacher promotion office, teachers were encouraged to attend COP for improvement of teaching. Table.2 indicates 3 purposes that most of teachers would want to see a new way of teaching by observing others so that they could adapt to their own way. New way at this point refers to how different instructors teach different lessons, not such kind of new teaching method experiment. Typically the procedure of teaching is followed the same flow. Second, to evaluate colleagues' performance, for instance, how they control the class, how they handle a problem that may occur during teaching, the interaction, etc., for discussing in feedback session. And third, they also want to improve their own teaching method by collecting feedback from observers as T-PHCH mentioned that *''I attend COP for improving learning-teaching process both myself and students, the observers will know well the behavior of students and how the teachers use the teaching technique''*. However, school administrators have different way of observing on COP that they were there to see the problem, the readiness of teachers in preparations, and the progress of students with the main purpose of improving teaching and learning in a better condition. This could be said that teachers involving in COP is for continuing professional development, even if they were accepted as experienced teachers.

Table 2: Teachers' objectives and reasons of attending COP

ID	Objectives and reasons
03	To improve new teachers and find new technique for my teaching
07	Some content of the lesson did not understand well and teaching method is not well practiced
08	To improve learning-teaching, to develop my own knowledge
10	Because of the assignment from mathematic unit and comments from students
11	It allows me to know and see teachers' teaching technique that each teacher has different instructing method
12	To exchange lesson from other teachers and adapt to my own teaching and see status of students
13	To develop teachers' teaching skills as well as students' knowledge
16	To evaluate my own teaching and other teachers
17	To give and get feedback from each others
1,2,14	To see other teachers' teaching technique, find good point to improve myself, and find weakness for further improvement

3. Lessons learned from COP

Along side the purposes on COP; what teachers got is not far from their expectation. Table.3 demonstrates that teachers are very concerned and really want to learn teaching techniques from colleagues. All most all of them pay attention on teaching methodology rather than the content of the lesson. As T-SKH indicates that *'' ...mostly I got teaching method, for the past time I did rarely use student-centered teaching method, after having COP I allow students do activity more frequent''*. This is common among experienced teachers. Nonetheless, there were still some teachers mentioned in the content of the lesson in feedback session.

Table 3: lessons learned from COP

ID	Lesson learned from COP
01	Teaching technique and how to evaluate students
02	Learn technique of each teacher, know how to setup activity to respond to lesson
03	Technique and setting activity
08	Technique
07	Teaching method, knowledge, and new lesson
10	Setting activity of each point of lesson
13	Know good point and weak point of the teacher
12	Teaching technique, explanation, questioning, and class control
16	Teaching technique, how to use teaching aid, answering question technique that responds to the level of students.

4. COP utilization

Looking more details, see table.4, teachers use COP variously especially about teaching methodology. As T-PHCH mentioned that *''I admitted that I have used some lesson learn after doing COP, for instance, finding teaching aids, every class I have to have at least one teaching aid''* and T-SKH also addressed that '' *... for example, trigonometry, before that I ask student to draw on the white board; after doing COP, I suggest students to draw in computer by using program GPS*''. Although participants might mention of using lesson learned in different ways; but participated observation revealed that there is no different change between before and after doing COP. The flow of teaching plan and activity students do in the class remain the same. This might be cause of the differences of the lesson and the level of students.

Table 4: Utilization of COP

ID	Utilization of COP
01	Using teaching technique to my own teaching, and using multi methods of evaluation to my teaching
02	Used some lesson, some technique to teaching
03	Adopting what observed to the lesson plan, for example, setting group, allowing students have more participation in lesson
07, 08	Transferring knowledge technique
10	Setting activity with multi methods, make and use more teaching aids, class control
13	It is helpful for teaching preparation and student evaluation
12	Using to improve weak point
16	Trying to create teaching aids and questions so that students could see and think logically
17	Explanation method of doing activity, questioning, making teaching aids

5. The impact of COP

Attending COP is unavoidably negative and positive impact. For the positive impact, it is hard to measure and noticed; on the other hand, it is easily noticeable on the negative impact. Since the activity of COP likes to implement in an official time; so a lot of teachers have to leave classroom. This might be a reason that most of teachers agree on time wasted, see table. 5. Further more, the nature of the class has been lost. Because of nervousness and excitement being observed, and afraid to be criticized; instructors might be over prepared and might have over interaction during the class. Nonetheless, it is a good change that teachers will learn and exchange experience from each other. It's time for them to do full time teaching and complete in 5 steps.

Table 5: the impact of COP

ID	Impacts
07	Wastes time
11	Teachers leave the class for observation, teaching is unnaturally, and students got pressure
13	Wastes time if it practices at the same time, students have concern, and unnatural
01	Waste time, teachers who has been observing get nervous, and loss nature, waste money because a lot of teaching aids preparation
02	Wastes time, instructor got excitement
03	Have to leave the class because of the same time
10	Waste time, and got nervous when there is not enough knowledge in that lesson
12	Sometimes, the feedback cause a problem to both instructor and observer
14	Wastes time, have to leave the classroom
16	Waste of time, there will be no effective if it is a big group
17	Teaching is unnatural as usual, instructor pays much attention as a result, lesson slow
08	Waste time

Discussion

Doing COP among mathematics teachers in Teacher Training College is not casual, but it is more likely assignment from the school that teachers from each unit have to have COP in each semester. This might influence their purposes of observation. The concept of learning from each other might be effective and more interest if the instructors that they observed are registered as expert teachers from outside. Therefore there is a need of expert invitation from other schools, universities, or other countries.

Although observers have accepted that they have learned new ways, new teaching method, and other lessons from colleagues; but utilization after involving COP is not concrete. It could be said that what they gained might not be appropriately adaptable to their own or not interesting at all.

Statistic from the white paper of the school shows high attention in COP. However, doing a lot of COP doesn't mean that teachers will become expert right away; but it cause time and energy. Advisably, less COP but creative and interesting for observers may be produce better results.

Conclusions and recommendations

COP among mathematics teachers did not pay much improvement in teacher professional development. The purpose of observation is varied but channels to methodology than content of the lesson and other issues. Although most of respondents have high working experience; but regarding their own requirement they still eager more improvement in teaching. Observers might gain a lot of knowledge, due to different subject, though teachers could only adapt about teaching methodology. Time consumption pays a huge impact on COP. Further study is required to look deeper on comparison about attitude of mathematics teachers and other teachers who teach different subjects.

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